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ABSTRACT

This final report of Project Prepare, a federally funded program at the University of Tennessee, describes the critical features and specific goals of the project, as well as program evaluation methods and results. The program was funded to develop a personnel preparation program for early childhood specialists that emphasized an interdisciplinary, inclusive approach. Critical features and goals included: (1) a sequence of competency-based coursework and seminars that prepared students in child-related, team-related, and agency-related competencies; (2) integration of course content to increase the number of licensed personnel possessing the competencies to provide comprehensive, transdisciplinary services to infants, toddlers, and preschool children and their families in natural settings; (3) an interdisciplinary focus that prepared personnel to assume diverse roles and responsibilities related to meeting the needs of young children with disabilities and their families; and (4) expand the knowledge of how to most effectively implement a "research into practice" model of personnel preparation. (SG)

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ED 459 582

FINAL REPORT

Preparing Early Childhood Special Educators for Inclusive Settings Project
(Project Prepare)

Training Early Intervention and Preschool Personnel
PR#Ho29G970041-99
CFDA# 84.029G

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EC 308 771

Project Prepare

Final Report

Purpose

The stated purpose of Project Prepare was to develop a new personnel preparation program that prepared early childhood special educators for interdisciplinary roles for working with infants, toddlers, and preschool children with disabilities, and their families. Critical features of the program included: 1) a sequence of competency-based coursework and seminars that prepared students in child-related, family-related, team-related, and agency-related competencies, 2) integration of course content and fieldwork experiences, and 3) interdisciplinary focus that prepared personnel to assume diverse roles and responsibilities related to meeting the needs of young children with disabilities and their families. Faculty with expertise in early childhood special education, early childhood education, instructional technology, history and philosophy of education, and teacher education collaborated in the development and delivery of this new undergraduate early childhood special education program, emphasizing an interdisciplinary focus which prepares students for team-based, family-centered, and child responsive practice. Our emphasis on the early childhood special educator's new roles and skills begins even before students are admitted into the program and runs throughout the coursework and internship. Each applicant for the program was interviewed and given descriptive information about the program. Although applicants were not expected to have any knowledge of early childhood special education, the interviews and written questionnaires completed by the applications gave us an opportunity to screen out candidates who expressed attitudes inconsistent with program objectives and instructional approaches. While the program did attract and accept a number of students comfortable and familiar with young children with

disabilities, including several who were parents or siblings of children with disabilities, and others who had worked in other settings that served children with disabilities, about half of the students had limited exposure to young children with disabilities. After their participation in the field experiences that included a large number of young children with disabilities, they came to realize that they could be successful in working with a wide variety of young children with disabilities.

The program was built upon the knowledge and skills required for PreK-1 Special Education Licensure in Tennessee and the teacher education structures at the University of Tennessee, including a bachelor's degree in special education, an early childhood concentration, and a professional year of internship. The Inclusive Early Childhood Education (IECE) faculty identified 28 credits from the special education major and the internship year as the primary points of program delivery. The 28-credit pre-internship coursework and field experiences were put together into two integrated blocks. The fall semester integrated block of courses included content specific to the field of early childhood special education, including foundations, assessment and instructional strategies, curriculum development, guidelines for family-centered practices, assistive technology, and activity-based interventions. During this semester, students spent two mornings a week for ten weeks in a Title One preschool program that integrated children with disabilities and a Birth to Three center-based program. The spring semester integrated block of courses also included general early childhood education students. Content of this block included philosophies of education, methods of instruction, multicultural issues, instructional technology, and inclusion principles. During this semester, students spent three full days at a developmental preschool serving children with disabilities, three full days at a Title One Family Resource Center, and 6 full days in

elementary schools that include children with disabilities. Year-long internship placements built upon these preinternship experiences.

The specific goals of the project are presented below.

1. Increase the number of licensed personnel who possess the competencies to provide comprehensive, transdisciplinary services to infants, toddlers, and preschool children and their families in natural, inclusive settings.
2. Contribute to the knowledge and practice about the unique skills and roles for ECSE professionals providing services in natural, inclusive early education settings.
3. Expand our knowledge on how to most effectively implement a "research into practice" model of personnel preparation.

Evaluation Results

We designed and implemented a Discrepancy Evaluation Model (DEM) evaluation process as outlined on pages 33-36 in the grant application. Through the DEM evaluation process, performance information is gathered to describe the program's effect. This performance information is compared to the standard we had outlined in our program design to determine what discrepancies exist. Table 1 describes each evaluation concern, source of information, and results for evaluating the questions posed in the evaluation design. All of the program graduates (100%) are employed in the field of training supported by the grant. Placement data of the 12 program graduates from 2000 and 2001 indicate that 10 are employed in early intervention settings and 2 are employed in inclusive elementary education settings (See attached Performance Report). Five students are still in the program and will complete their internship year (5th year) during the 2001-2002 year.

Table 1. Evaluation Design

Evaluation Concern	Source of Information	Results
A. Coursework	Competency checklist by students at end of each semester; course syllabi; projects turned into instructors; course evaluations; Praxis Exams	Students completed a competency checklist based on the Tennessee Professional Knowledge and Skills for Early Childhood Special Education Licensure at the beginning of the academic year. Students updated the checklist at the end of each semester and during their internship year. Students indicated increased competencies over time on this checklist. By the end of their internship year, all of the students successfully passed all of the national tests required for early childhood special education licensure. Overview of course syllabi indicated that the special education preschool/early childhood knowledge and skills competencies were addressed in the pre-internship courses, practicum field experiences, and internship year. All of the students' projects required for course grade were satisfactory. The average rating of all questions on the campus teaching course evaluation were 4.25 on a 5-point scale for the pre-intern block, indicating a very good to excellent rating. Further analysis is ongoing.
B. Practicum and Internship Fieldwork	College supervisor and on-site supervisor reports; competency checklist; reflective journals; reports during weekly meetings; Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment for Teacher Evaluation	Based on students' reflective journals, competency checklist, field site assignments, and practicum activities, the practicum sites provided appropriate practice opportunities for students to obtain the general early childhood special education competencies. On-site supervisor reports and meetings with field-based professionals indicated that the inclusive placements resulted in students developing skills in new roles of collaboration. Students were placed in a preschool special education classroom with a mentoring teacher for the majority of the school year. Other placements included primary general education classrooms that included children with disabilities. All of the students had satisfactory ratings on the Performance Standards on the Tennessee Evaluation Framework for Teacher Evaluation.
C. Recruitment	List of contacts with minority groups associations, early intervention agencies, and LEAs	We were able to recruit two students from ethnic minorities. Thus 20% of the students who were admitted and completed the program came from ethnic minorities. This is a much higher percentage than the university's minority enrollment. Of the 12 program graduates, 10 graduates are working in early intervention settings. The other 2 program graduates are working in inclusive settings.

D. Placement and Proficiency of Program Graduates Certification	Licensure Questionnaires to program graduates	100% of the program graduates qualified for license with scores on the Praxis exceeding state minimum standards. Graduate follow-up surveys indicate consistently high rates of satisfaction with their program. Placement data of graduates from 2000 and 2001 indicate that 10 are employed in early intervention settings and 2 were employed in inclusive elementary education settings.
E. Project Management	Timelines in grant; progress status reports	Specific timelines for completion of project objectives and activities have been accomplished as indicated in yearly progress status reports.

Future Activities

Project Prepare personnel preparation program was originally designed for students majoring in special education with a concentration in early childhood in the College of Education; however, the advantages of creating a dual licensure program in early childhood education (birth-grade 4) and early childhood special education (birth-grade 1) is in transition now. The dual licensure program is based upon a major in child development in the College of Human Ecology, as is required by state guidelines. We are collaborating with the faculty from Child and Family Studies Department in the College of Human Ecology and expect for this to happen within the next year.

The program was funded for a three-year period and is continuing to be offered by the University, although students no longer receive stipends. One of the most critical variables in the success of the program is the recruitment of students. The Tennessee early childhood special education licensure certifies personnel to work with children with disabilities from birth to first grade. Because of this narrow focus, many students elect not to participate in our program. We anticipate that creation of the dual licensure program will increase interest and student enrollment.

ATTACHMENTS

Part III--Annual Performance Report--Personnel Data--Student Outcomes (continued)

Section B--Placement Information

For all individuals who were receiving Federal stipends from the Division of Personnel Preparation, Office of Special Education Programs, please provide the following information. How many are:

a. 12 Employed b. 0 Unemployed c. 0 Unknown.

For those employed in the field of education or in a related services field, enter the number who are:

1. a. 12 Employed in the field of training supported by DPP (targeting children ages 0-21).
   b. ___Employed in another special education or related services field (targeting children ages 0-21).
   c. ___Employed in a different field of education.

Total

2. Location of employment. How many are:
   a. 8 Working in the State where training occurred.
   b. 3 Working out of State but within the region.
   c. 1 Working out of the region.

3. Type of occupation. How many are:
   a. 12 Teachers
   b. ___Teacher Aides, classroom aides
   c. ___Administrators
   d. ___Administrative Support
   e. ___Psychologists, counselors
   f. ___Postsecondary faculty
   g. ___Researchers
   h. ___Recreational therapists
   i. ___Physical therapists
   j. ___Occupational therapists
   k. ___Audiologists
   l. ___School nurses
   m. ___Other related services occupations (please list/describe).

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Part III--Annual Performance Report--Personnel Data--Student Outcomes (continued)

Section B--Placement Information (continued)

4. How many directly serve children (from birth to age 21) in the following levels or age groupings? If an individual works with more than one group, count that individual in the group that is the major focus; i.e., the largest population served by that individual, or the greatest amount of time spent by that individual.

a. 2 Infants (birth through age 2)
b. 8 Preschool (ages 3 through 5)
c. 2 Elementary (kindergarten or grades 1 through 6)
d. ___ Secondary (grades 7 through 12)
e. ___ Postsecondary (to age 21)
f. ___ Ungraded or other.

5. How many do <u>not</u> serve children directly? (This may include, for example, some researchers, some IHE faculty, some SEA personnel).

0 Do not directly serve children.

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